



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## AFTER A SKIN CANCER DIAGNOSIS: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

**A diagnosis of skin cancer can leave you and your loved ones feeling uncertain, anxious and overwhelmed. When your health care team talks about your diagnosis and treatment, ask questions about anything you don't understand.**

### THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

Your team of doctors, nurses and social workers are valuable sources of support as you cope with a cancer diagnosis. Good communication with your doctor will help improve the quality of the care you receive. It's a good idea to bring a list of questions to the appointment and write down the doctor's responses. In addition, if possible, bring someone with you to any appointment; another set of ears can help reduce confusion. For more information on talking with your doctor, read CancerCare's booklet titled, "Communicating with Your Health Care Team."

### QUESTIONS THAT YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

**Since I've been diagnosed, I've been overwhelmed. How can I better cope with my diagnosis?**

A cancer diagnosis turns a person's world upside down emotionally, financially and physically. Your team of doctors, nurses and social workers are valuable sources of support as you cope with a cancer diagnosis. Oncology social workers are licensed professionals who counsel people affected by cancer, providing emotional support and helping people access practical assistance. CancerCare's oncology social workers provide individual counseling, support



groups and locate services face-to-face, online or on the telephone, free of charge. To learn more, visit [www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org) or call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

### What type of skin cancer do I have?

Skin cancer occurs when the cells found in the skin begin to change and grow uncontrollably, forming a tumor (also called a nodule), which can be either cancerous or benign. The main types of skin cancer are melanoma, basal cell, squamous cell and merkel cell carcinoma.

**What stage is my tumor?** A tumor's stage refers to its size and extent of spread in the body—e.g., whether it has spread to lymph nodes or other organs. Cancer that has spread to other organs is called metastatic cancer. A cancer's stage is often denoted by a Roman numeral (I, II, III or IV). The higher the numeral, the more the cancer has spread within the body.

**What is my recommended treatment plan?** Depending on the information that your doctor has learned about your tumor, your treatment options may include surgery, radiation, immunotherapy and chemotherapy.

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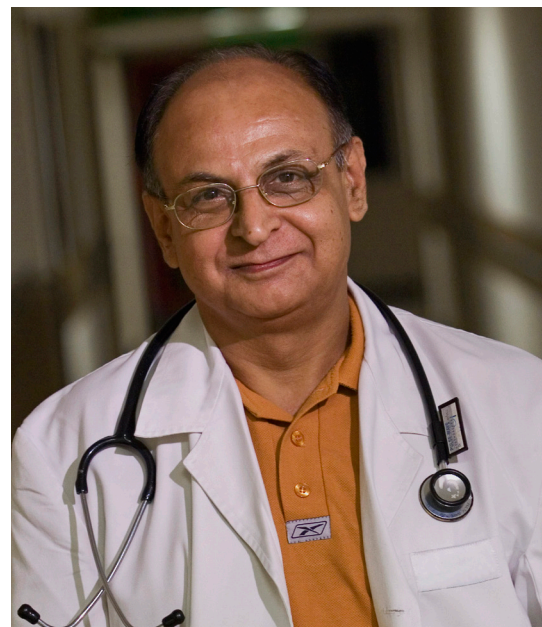
**What side effects can I experience throughout my treatment plan? Will my treatment plan affect my appearance?** Asking questions about side effects can help you better cope and be prepared. Also, a key to managing side effects is to be aware of them and communicate with your health care team when they arise. Your health care team can help you cope with side effects of skin cancer treatment.

**I'm worried about the cost of my cancer treatment. Where can I find financial assistance?** The financial costs associated with cancer are often overwhelming, even with insurance. Read CancerCare's fact sheet titled, "Sources of Financial Assistance" for reliable resources. You can also visit CancerCare's searchable, online database of financial and practical assistance guide at [www.cancercare.org/helpinghand](http://www.cancercare.org/helpinghand). This comprehensive online tool features up-to-date contact information and descriptions for hundreds of national and regional organizations offering financial help to people with cancer.

**Should I be worried about actinic keratoses?** Actinic keratoses are small, flaky pieces of skin look a little bit like a scab. They can appear on the forehead and other parts of the face, as well as the neck, hands, arms and chest—all areas exposed to the sun. You might be able to wash or rub them off, but they tend to come back in the same place. Actinic keratoses are common, and many cause no problem. However, some may develop into skin cancer and therefore should be monitored carefully. Make sure you let your health care team know if you have actinic keratoses.

**Should I seek a second opinion?** Usually with a new diagnosis there is a period of time, depending on the cancer type and stage, before treatment begins. During this time, getting a second opinion may help give you a peace of mind or an alternative treatment possibility. Talk to your health care team and read CancerCare's "When to Get a Second Opinion" fact sheet for more information.

**Is there a clinical trial I can participate in? If so, will it be covered by my insurance?** Clinical trials are the standard by which we measure the worth of new treatments and the quality of life of patients as they receive those treatments. For this reason, doctors and researchers urge people with cancer to take part in clinical trials. Read CancerCare's "Clinical Trials: What You Need to Know" fact sheet to learn more information on clinical trials.



### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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